

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SAB-02 FAA-00

DOT-00 /057 W

-----100840 272032Z /66

O R 271955Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2927

INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

PANCANAL

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 5371

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, PINT, EAIR, MILI, PN, PQ, BL

SUBJECT: MEDIA CHARGES THAT U.S. PLANES HARASS HELICOPTER

CARRYING BANZER AND TORRIJOS

SUMMARY: GOP-GUIDED "CRITICA" AND "MATUTINO" REPORT THAT HELICOPTER CARRYING TORRIJOS AND BANZER ALMOST COLLIDED WITH USAF A-7S OVER THE CANAL ZONE YESTERDAY AFTERNOON. (WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CONFIRM THAT TORRIJOS WAS ABOARD). PANAMANIAN PILOT CLAIMS HE TOOK EVASIVE ACTION TO AVOID A COLLISION. PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FROM FAA CONTROL CENTER IN CANAL ZONE INDICATES THAT TWO A-7 AIRCRAFT ROUTINELY PASSED HELICOPTER WHILE IT WAS UNDER FAA CONTROL. FAA WAS NOT INFORMED THAT HELICOPTER WAS CARRYING VIPS. FOREIGN MINISTER GONZALEZ-REVILLA MENTIONED INCIDENT TO AMBASSADOR AT RECEPTION LAST NIGHT. USMILGP AIR FORCE SECTION CHIEF IS DISCUSSING SITUATION WITH PANAMANIAN AIR FORCE COMMANDER THIS MORNING. END SUMMARY.

1. THIS MORNING'S "CRITICA" HEADLINES "THREAT AGAINST BANZER AND OMAR". STORY REPORTS THAT A PANAMANIAN AIR FORCE HELICOPTER RETURNING TORRIJOS AND BANZER TO PANAMA CITY FROM
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THE COUNCIL OF STATE MEETING IN SANTIAGO TOOK EVASIVE ACTION TO AVOID A COLLISION WITH TWO USAF A-7S. PILOT CLAIMS THAT HE WAS OVER THE CANAL ZONE AT 3,500 FEET AND HAD JUST RECEIVED PERMISSION FROM FAA CONTROL TO DESCENT AND MAKE RADIO CONTACT WITH PAITILLA AIRPORT (IN PANAMA CITY) WHEN TWO A-7S "APPEARED FROM THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION AT TERRIFIC SPEED". PILOT "IMMEDIATELY MADE A SHARP TURN, THEREBY AVOIDING THE FATAL CRASH".

HE STATED THAT FAA DID NOT INFORM HIM THAT THESE AIRCRAFT WERE IN THE VICINITY. "CRITICA" ASSURES ITS READERS THAT PANAMA "WILL DENOUNCE BEFORE THE WORLD THIS TRAMPLING OF THE DIGNITY OF OUR PEOPLE". ARTICLE ALSO APPEARED ON FRONT PAGE OF "MATUTINO".

2. A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE ALLEGED INCIDENT FROM THE FAA CONTROL CENTER IN THE CANAL ZONE INDICATES THAT THE PANAMANIAN AIR FORCE HELICOPTER WAS ON A ROUTINE FLIGHT FROM FARALLON TO PAITILLA AT 3,500 FEET. WHILE PASSING OVER HOWARD AFB, PILOT REQUESTED LOWER ALTITUDE. HE WAS AUTHORIZED TO DESCENT TO 3,000 FEET, SINCE A LOWER ALTITUDE WOULD HAVE PUT HIM IN THE HOWARD TERMINAL CONTROL ZONE. FAA ADVISED PILOT ABOUT HOWARD TRAFFIC, INCLUDING THE TWO A-7S. FAA CONTROLLER INFORMED THE A-7 PILOTS OF THE HELICOPTER'S PRESENCE AND INSTRUCTED TO CHANGE COURSE TO MAINTAIN A PRUDENT DISTANCE FROM THE HELICOPTER. A-7 PILOTS STATED THAT THEY HAD THE HELICOPTER IN SIGHT AT FOUR MILES AND WERE INSTRUCTED BY FAA TO MAINTAIN VISUAL SEPARATION. PANAMANIAN HELICOPTER WAS THEN GIVEN PERMISSION TO CONTACT PAITILLA TOWER AND DESCENT AT PILOT'S DISCRETION. A-7S SUBSEQUENTLY PASSED BELOW AND BEHIND HELICOPTER AT A SEPARATION OF BETWEEN ONE-HALF AND ONE MILE, AS INDICATED BY THE FAA RADAR. FAA HAS THE COMPLETE INCIDENT ON TAPE.

3. FAA STATES THAT IT WAS NOT INFORMED THAT THE
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HELICOPTER WAS CARRYING BANZER AND TORRIJOS. NORMALLY, OTHER AIRCRAFT ARE KEPT FURTHER AWAY FROM VIP FLIGHTS TO AVOID INCIDENTS OF THIS NATURE.

4. FOREIGN MINISTER GONZALEZ-REVILLA MENTIONED THE INCIDENT TO THE AMBASSADOR AT LAST NIGHT'S RECEPTION FOR PRESIDENT BANZER. U.S. MILITARY GROUP AIR FORCE SECTION CHIEF WAS ASSIGNED TO COORDINATE AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ALLEGED INCIDENT WITH THE FAA AND THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES IN THE CANAL ZONE. HE IS MEETING WITH THE CHIEF OF THE PANAMANIAN AIR FORCE THIS MORNING TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION.

5. WE HAVE HEARD THAT TORRIJOS WAS NOT ABOARD AND WILL SEEK TO CONFIRM.

JORDEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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"CRITICAL" AND "MATUTINO" REPORT
TAGS: PBOR, PINT, EAIR, MILI, PGOV, PN, PQ, BL, US, (BANZER SUAREZ, HUGO), (TORRIJOS HERRERA, OMAR)
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